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**Central African Republic:  
The Regime's Problems  
and Prospects** ☐

The pro-Western government of General Andre Kolingba, which took over in September from the hapless Dacko regime, faces growing criticism and dissent inspired by economic and tribal problems. Although the government's difficulties still appear manageable, they threaten economic recovery efforts, could lead to serious divisions in the military, and could increase the country's vulnerability to Libyan-backed subversion. Prospects for survival will depend on his ability to placate political and tribal opposition, to progress toward economic reconstruction, and to retain French confidence in his leadership. French economic and military backing is crucial to the new regime's survival. At present, Paris sees no alternative to Kolingba, although under more ideal circumstances the Mitterrand government would prefer to be dealing with a civilian regime. ☐

France is the Western country with the most direct interest in the CAR, a former colony which received its independence in 1960. Paris, viewing the CAR as strategically important to its interests in the Central African region, maintains a sizable contingent of French troops in the country. The CAR shares borders with Chad and Sudan, which have been active targets of Qadhafi's machinations, and serves as a buffer state in French eyes against further Libyan adventurism. The French military presence in the CAR is particularly reassuring to mineral-rich Gabon and Zaire, where France has significant economic interests to protect. ☐

**Background to Kolingba's Takeover**

Army Chief of Staff Kolingba reluctantly assumed power on 1 September 1981 with the apparent approval of the French and of then President David Dacko. Kolingba claimed he planned to restore political and economic order, a goal that had eluded Dacko. Dacko, President from 1960 to 1966, was restored to power in September 1979 by French troops, ending the tyrannical rule of Emperor Bokassa. But Dacko's poor health and gradual loss of political strength left him unable



*President of the Central Africa Republic, Gen.  
Andre-Dieudonne Kolingba*

to cope with deteriorating political and economic conditions, and he quickly lost the support of the Mitterrand government. ☐

Kolingba inherited the results of 15 years of political and economic deterioration. Bokassa left a legacy of political division, massive corruption, economic mismanagement, and abuse of human rights. Annual declines in diamond and cotton production, rising unemployment, and falling government revenues since the late 1960s left the economy in a shambles. Successive governments were unable to pay civil service salaries without French budgetary support. This led to a severe deterioration in the investment climate, and foreign aid donors grew reluctant to give assistance. ☐

Kolingba also stepped into a bitter and divisive political struggle marked by an uneasy standoff between the previous regime and a coalition of opposition

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parties. Political unrest had accelerated after the March 1980 presidential election, in which Dacko narrowly defeated the main opposition leader—Ange Patasse—in an allegedly rigged contest. This led to riots in Bangui, and Dacko's subsequent suspension of legislative and municipal elections aroused further discontent. Mounting opposition pressure for a role in government culminated in the bombing in July of a Bangui movie theater by a small, Libyan-backed CAR political party. The situation was further polarized by the banning of two major parties, the threatened arrest of the charismatic Patasse, and the opposition's call for Dacko's resignation. [ ]

#### The New Regime

Kolingba, 45, is president of the ruling Military Committee for National Recovery as well as Chief of State, Defense Minister, and military Chief of Staff. After eight years in the French Army, Kolingba rose through the ranks of the CAR Army, serving under Bokassa and Dacko. During his military career, Kolingba gained a reputation as a straightforward, apolitical soldier loyal to the government of the day. [ ]

Kolingba is a member of the small, southern Yakoma tribe, and Central Africans initially welcomed his leadership as a long overdue change from the political predominance of southern M'Baka tribesmen under Dacko and Bokassa. Lacking charisma, he remains little known and has stayed out of the limelight as much as possible. Moreover, Kolingba is a cautious man, not prone to precipitate or radical action. [ ]

Each of the 23 officers on the Military Committee for National Recovery also holds a cabinet post. Kolingba initially chose them because they represented a tribal, regional, and political balance; he warned them against partisan political activities. Although ostensibly loyal to Kolingba, many Committee members retain varying degrees of sympathy for one or another of CAR's opposition groups. Several have been criticized for lacking the technical expertise and experience to tackle the country's economic problems, and for their excessive concern with salary and spoils of office. Kolingba himself apparently favors a collegial style of rule and does not usually make unilateral decisions. [ ]

Upon assuming power, Kolingba suspended the constitution and banned all political party activity. He has promised to restore civilian rule once his regime is satisfied that order and stability have been reestablished. He has no political ambitions and does not foresee an extended stay in power. Although he has presented no timetable for a return to civilian rule, Kolingba has expressed a desire to begin a dialogue with leaders of the political groups. [ ]

The new regime's first priority has been to restore investor confidence and revitalize the economy through austerity and anticorruption programs. Kolingba has pressed for economic and technical assistance from a variety of Western and other nations in an effort to reduce a budget deficit and to supplement the country's traditional dependence on France. The new government, believing that it faces a serious subversive threat from Libya, has also sought increased foreign military assistance. [ ]

#### Political Problems

The goal of enforced political tranquility has so far eluded the Kolingba regime. The initial wait-and-see attitude of Central Africans toward the new regime has given way to accusations by opposition groups of tribal favoritism and autocratic government and to countercharges by the regime of disloyalty in the government. An atmosphere of mutual distrust and paranoia is reappearing in Bangui, although not yet to the extent that existed under Dacko. The regime's planned austerity and anticorruption campaigns have run into controversy that threatens to heighten the political tensions. [ ]

Leaders of banned opposition groups (see chart) have begun to complain that Kolingba's failure to submit a timetable for return to civilian rule is deliberate, and that he is forming a regime dominated by fellow Yakoma tribesmen. A number of Yakoma cabinet ministers continue to press Kolingba to expand the tribe's role in government. Although Kolingba appears reluctant to consolidate Yakoma dominance, his appointment of several fellow tribesmen to advisory posts has fed tribal jealousies. Tribes of the northern savannah region—the Kabas, Bayas, Bandas, and

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### Opposition Groups in the Central African Republic

Group	Orientation
Central African People's Liberation Movement (MLPC) <sup>a</sup> <i>Leader:</i> Ange Patasse (Kaba tribe)	Largest group. Bases its influence on northern tribal resentment of southern rule. Leader uses socialist jargon, but is regarded as an opportunist. Calls for an early return to civilian rule and multiparty politics. Suspected of receiving Libyan financial support.
Independent Grouping for Political Reflection and Action (GIRA) <sup>a</sup> <i>Leader:</i> Francois Pehoua (Yakoma tribe)	Personal vehicle of its leader who finished third in March 1981 presidential election. A moderate, with no defined political program except for favoring a return to civilian rule.
Movement for Democracy and Independence (MDI) <sup>a</sup> <i>Leader:</i> Francois Gueret (Yakoma tribe)	Small and most moderate group. Seeks a return to civilian rule. Leader draws support mainly from civil servants and educated residents of Bangui.
Revolutionary Action Group (GAR) <i>Leaders:</i> Julien Zarambaud-Assingambi (Yakoma tribe) and Guy Darlan (Banziri tribe)	Newest and smallest group. Composed of low-level government functionaries. Trying to increase public awareness of the need to return to civilian rule by circulating clandestine tracts.
Central African National Liberation Movement (MCLN) <i>Leader:</i> Rodolf Idi Lala (tribe unknown)	Small, radical group reportedly receiving Libyan financial aid and guerrilla training. Claims responsibility for 1981 terrorist bombing in Bangui.
Oubangui Patriotic Front-Labor Party (FPO-PT) <i>Leader:</i> Abel Goumba (tribe unknown)	Small and most radical party. Espouses Marxist-Leninism. Suspected by government of receiving Soviet aid and some Libyan military training. <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Remnants of political parties officially recognized by the former Dacko regime and later banned by General Kolingba.

<sup>b</sup> Abel Goumba was recently reported to have been appointed rector of the University of Bangui by the Kolingba government.

Mandjias—remain frustrated by the traditional dominance of the southern-based M'Bakas and Yakomas, who live in the "riverian" region along the Oubangui River.

This north-south rivalry could boost the political fortunes of the charismatic Patasse. Patasse, the major would-be contender for national leadership, is a Kaba tribesman from the north and leader of the largest opposition group, the Central African People's Liberation Movement. Patasse's popularity is based primarily on northern tribal resentment of southern domination.

A proponent of African socialism, Patasse has a reputation as a leftist. He also favors an early return to civilian rule and to multiparty politics. Patasse has remained in self-imposed exile in France since late September, probably fearing arrest should he return

home. While abroad, he has cultivated contacts with various European socialist parties in an apparently unsuccessful search for support in opposing the Kolingba government. He also has sought to establish his credentials as a moderate with the French, but continues to be regarded by Paris as an unpredictable political opportunist without a real program.

#### Economic Challenges

At the time of Dacko's ouster, the country was in a downward economic and financial spiral, characterized by declining per capita income, growing dependence on imported food, ballooning budgetary and trade deficits, and a degenerating transportation system. The Kolingba government was immediately forced to seek new lines of credit and foreign investment, and to try economic austerity measures to secure continued French and international aid.

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Kolingba, however, has encountered growing public resistance to his austerity program. The first crucial measure announced by the new regime—put off by the Dacko government for fear it would backfire politically—was to reduce the civil service payroll, which in the past absorbed two-thirds of the CAR's budget. This action has prompted accusations of forced retirements based on tribal bias and could result in antigovernment demonstrations by officials slated for retirement. Other potentially controversial measures are scheduled reductions in the Army and among Foreign Ministry personnel serving abroad.

#### Foreign Affairs: Friends and Foes

The survival of the new government depends on continued French military and economic support. So far the Mitterrand government is inclined to back the regime, seeing no alternative. Although clearly favoring an eventual return to civilian rule, France appears unwilling to risk further political turmoil by pressing any time soon for elections.

At the request of President Dacko, France increased the number of its troops in the country from about 800 to 1,300 following Libya's occupation of Chad in late 1980. These troops—some 800 at Bouar and 500 in Bangui—provide symbolic support for the CAR, and serve as a psychological deterrent to Libyan subversion and as an example of continuing French commitment to the region.

Paris traditionally has been Bangui's largest source of economic and financial aid. In 1981, France paid the civil service salaries and financed one-half of the CAR's \$27 million budget deficit. France, however, has said it would provide budgetary aid in 1982 only if Bangui carries out IMF recommendations and some politically unpopular reforms, such as reduced civil service employment. Although Paris is likely to provide short-term assistance, such as month-to-month payment of civil service salaries, it will continue to press for stiff economic recovery measures. France also provides development aid for commercial, agricultural, and transportation projects involving some 425 French technicians.

Both Presidents Bongo of Gabon and Mobutu of Zaire endorsed Kolingba's takeover and have pledged their backing for his moderate regime. Both leaders have offered small amounts of financial aid and have tried to discourage Bangui from renewing relations with Libya or the Soviets. Mobutu considers Kolingba a "tribal brother" and the two leaders have developed a close relationship. Opposition leaders in the CAR lately have begun to complain that Bangui's close relations with Gabon and Zaire—both authoritarian, single-party states—are indicative of Kolingba's unwillingness to return to democracy.

Relations with Marxist-oriented Congo are strained by the presence in Brazzaville of CAR dissidents and by the Congo's recent decision to accept a Libyan People's Bureau. Followers of Abel Goumba's Oubangui Patriotic Front and some disaffected members of Bokassa's former imperial guard are exiles in the Congo. Last year, the Congolese Government expelled CAR opposition leader Idi Lala, head of the Central African National Liberation Movement, after he claimed responsibility for the terrorist bombings in Bangui in July.

Libya's continuing ambitions in Chad stir Central African fears over Qadhafi's aim to reduce French influence in the region. Former President Dacko broke relations with Tripoli in January 1980, claiming that Libya was funding antigovernment student protests. Qadhafi reportedly still gives financial and military aid to various CAR oppositionists, including Patasse, Lala, and Goumba.

Patasse took refuge in Tripoli after the French-led coup that ousted Bokassa and, during his exile in France, he maintained contacts with the Libyans. His followers were rumored to have received Libyan weapons via Chad, and his reluctance to reveal the source of his group's funds fueled suspicion that he enjoyed Libyan financing.

Lala reportedly maintains a residence in Tripoli and is rumored to control 200 Libyan-trained Central African mercenaries, who were poised in N'Djamena to infiltrate CAR during Libya's occupation of Chad. There are some indications that followers of Abel Goumba have transited Benin en route to Libya for paramilitary training.

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Although the Soviets also were expelled from Bangui in January 1980 by the jittery Dacko regime, Kolingba may opportunistically resume diplomatic ties in search of additional foreign assistance. The Soviets had a sizable presence in Bangui during former Emperor Bokassa's reign. Their assistance, particularly medical and higher education personnel, was valued. Nevertheless, the Central Africans will continue to be wary of alleged Soviet aid to Goumba's Oubangui Patriotic Front and other meddling by Moscow.

#### Outlook

The Kolingba regime is facing serious challenges from tribal and political factionalism in the military government, and from seemingly intractable economic problems. Thus far, the new President has tried to put national interests ahead of his own tribal loyalties, but he has been unable to submerge ethnic, regional, and political squabbling in his government. His preliminary steps toward economic reconstruction have met with public resistance and limited success.

To restore internal cohesion and effectiveness to his regime, Kolingba will have to recruit badly needed civilian administrators, remove some opposition sympathizers, and improve the qualifications of his cabinet ministers. But these steps will risk worsening tribal tensions and will boost northern support for rival leader Patasse. Although Kolingba decreed that cabinet ministers could not return to the military after serving in government, discharged ministers could become a source of political opposition.

The new regime's economic program has been effective only in stemming further deterioration, and the search for increased foreign assistance has yielded limited results. Unpopular austerity measures are threatening to trigger protests by disgruntled civil servants and students. Attempts by the political opposition to exploit this discontent, however, probably would be undermined by deep divisions between opposition leaders.

Kolingba also may find it necessary to compromise his pro-Western orientation by recognizing Libya and the Soviet Union in a desperate search for foreign aid. Although Qadhafi has withdrawn his troops from Chad, deepening tribal and political divisions and further economic deterioration could offer greater opportunities for Libyan meddling. French support seems secure in the short term, but if there were serious outbreaks of civilian unrest and the Kolingba regime grew increasingly unstable, France might press for a return to civilian rule.

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**Togo**

The recent coup in neighboring Ghana has heightened President Eyadema's fears that his 15-year-old, pro-Western regime could fall victim to similar economic and tribal pressures. He is also apprehensive about Ghana's renewed relations with Libya and the uncertain political orientation of the new Rawlings regime. Many former officials of the deposed Limann government have fled to Togo, which could become a source of friction with Accra. [redacted]

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The Togolese Government faces public dissatisfaction over an unchecked economic slowdown, economic mismanagement, widespread corruption, and persistent north-south tribal jealousies. Eyadema's heavyhanded management of recent army personnel problems has triggered accusations of tribal favoritism by southerners who form the majority of the army officer corps. Ewe tribesmen—predominant in both southern Togo and southeastern Ghana—have long resented control of the government by Eyadema's fellow northerners. [redacted]

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Even before the Ghana coup, Eyadema was increasingly nervous over his regime's vulnerabilities to Libyan intrigues, and he now fears that Togo will be subverted by Libyan-backed Benin and Ghana. He is concerned that Rawlings might lend support to Libyan-backed Togolese dissidents led by the son of former President Olympio, who Eyadema assassinated in 1963. Both Rawlings and the Olympios are from the Ewe tribe. Eyadema's growing insecurity could cause him to move closer to Qadhafi—he permitted a Libyan People's Bureau to open in Lome last November—and to give greater emphasis to nonalignment in an effort to avert Libyan inroads. [redacted]

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